JOE: Look, I know this is scary for you. But try to understand what it means to me. Will you try?

HARPER: Yes.

JOE: Good. Really try.

I think things are starting to change in the world.

HARPER: But I don't want . . .

JOE: Wait. For the good. Change for the good. America has rediscovered itself. Its sacred position among nations. And people aren't ashamed of that like they used to be. This is a great thing. The truth restored. Law restored. That's what President Reagan's done, Harper. He says "Truth exists and can be spoken proudly." And the country responds to him. We become better. More good. I need to be a part of that, I need something big to lift me up. I mean, six years ago the world seemed in decline, horrible, hopeless, full of unsolvable problems and crime and confusion and hunger and . . .

HARPER: But it still seems that way. More now than before. They say the ozone layer is . . .

JOE: Harper . . .

HARPER: And today out the window on Atlantic Avenue there was a schizophrenic traffic cop who was making these . . .

JOE: Stop it! I'm trying to make a point.

HARPER: So am I.

JOE: You aren't even making sense, you . . .

HARPER: My point is the world seems just as . . .

JOE: It only seems that way to you because you never go out in the world, Harper, and you have emotional problems.

HARPER: I do so get out in the world.

JOE: You don't. You stay in all day, fretting about imaginary . . .

HARPER: I get out. I do. You don't know what I do.

JOE: You don't stay in all day.
HARPER: No.
JOE: Well. . . . Yes you do.
HARPER: That's what you think.
JOE: Where do you go?
HARPER: Where do *you* go? When you walk.
(Pause, then angrily.) And I DO NOT have emotional problems.
JOE: I'm sorry.
HARPER: And if I do have emotional problems it's from living with you. Or . . .
JOE: I'm sorry buddy, I didn't mean to . . .
HARPER: Or if you do think I do then you should never have married me. You have all these secrets and lies.
JOE: I want to be married to you, Harper.
HARPER: You shouldn't. You never should.

(Pause.)

Hey buddy. Hey buddy.
JOE: Buddy kiss . . .

(They kiss.)

HARPER: I heard on the radio how to give a blowjob.
JOE: What?
HARPER: You want to try?
JOE: You really shouldn't listen to stuff like that.
HARPER: Mormons can give blowjobs.
JOE: *Harper.*
HARPER: *(Imitating his tone.) Joe.*
It was a little Jewish lady with a German accent.
This is a good time. For me to make a baby.

(Little pause. JOE *turns away.)*

HARPER: Then they went on to a program about holes in the ozone layer. Over Antarctica. Skin burns, birds go blind, icebergs melt. The world's coming to an end.

Scene VIII

That night. Split scene: HARPER *and* JOE *at home;* PRIOR *and* LOUIS *in bed.*

HARPER: Where were you?
JOE: Out.
HARPER: Where?
JOE: Just out. Thinking.
HARPER: It's late.
JOE: I had a lot to think about.
HARPER: I burned dinner.
JOE: Sorry.
HARPER: Not my dinner. My dinner was fine. Your dinner. I put it back in the oven and turned everything up as high as it could go and I watched till it burned black. It's still hot. Very hot. Want it?
JOE: You didn't have to do that.
HARPER: I know. It just seemed like the kind of thing a mentally deranged sex-starved pill-popping housewife would do.
JOE: Uh huh.
HARPER: So I did it. Who knows anymore what I have to do?
JOE: How many pills?
HARPER: A bunch. Don't change the subject.
JOE: I won't talk to you when you . . .
HARPER: No. No. Don't do that! I'm . . . fine, pills are not the problem, not our problem, I WANT TO KNOW WHERE YOU'VE BEEN! I WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON!
JOE: Going on with what? The job?
HARPER: Not the job.
JOE: I said I need more time.
HARPER: Not the job!
JOE: Mr. Cohn, I talked to him on the phone, he said I had to hurry . . .
HARPER: Not the . . .
JOE: But I can't get you to talk sensibly about anything so . . .
HARPER: SHUT UP!
JOE: Then what?

HARPER: Stick to the subject.

JOE: I don't know what that is. You have something you want to ask me? Ask me. Go.

HARPER: I . . . can't. I'm scared of you.

JOE: I'm tired, I'm going to bed.

HARPER: Tell me without making me ask. Please.

JOE: This is crazy, I'm not . . .

HARPER: When you come through the door at night your face is never exactly the way I remembered it. I get surprised by something . . . mean and hard about the way you look. Even the weight of you in the bed at night, the way you breathe in your sleep seems unfamiliar.

You terrify me.

JOE: *(Cold.)* I know who you are.

HARPER: Yes. I'm the enemy. That's easy. That doesn't change. You think you're the only one who hates sex; I do; I hate it with you; I do. I dream that you batter away at me till all my joints come apart, like wax, and I fall into pieces. It's like a punishment. It was wrong of me to marry you. I knew you . . . *(She stops herself.)* It's a sin, and it's killing us both.

JOE: I can always tell when you've taken pills because it makes you red-faced and sweaty and frankly that's very often why I don't want to . . .

HARPER: Because . . .

JOE: Well, you aren't pretty. Not like this.

HARPER: I have something to ask you.

JOE: Then ASK! ASK! What in hell are you . . .

HARPER: Are you a homo?

(Pause.)

Are you? If you try to walk out right now I'll put your dinner back in the oven and turn it up so high the whole building will fill with smoke and everyone in it will asphyxiate. So help me God I will.

Now answer the question.

JOE: What if I . . .

(Small pause.)

HARPER: Then tell me, please. And we'll see.

JOE: No. I'm not.

I don't see what difference it makes.